

G71J  
C  
NOV 7 1917  
New Series II, Volume Four

Number Five (Supplement)

APRIL, 1917

Published by Goucher College

Issued in August, October, December, February, April, and June

---

---

BULLETIN OF  
GOUCHER COLLEGE  
BALTIMORE, MD.



PHI BETA KAPPA

1917

"Entered as second-class matter August 30, 1916, at the Baltimore, Md., postoffice under the Act of August 24, 1912."



# GOUCHER COLLEGE

BALTIMORE

## PHI BETA KAPPA ADDRESS

Delivered before the Students and Faculty  
of Goucher College

by

VIRGINIA CROCHERON GILDERSLEEVE, PH. D.,  
Dean of Barnard College

MARCH 14, 1917

BALTIMORE  
MARYLAND



## THE SPIRIT OF SCHOLARSHIP

*Mr. President, and Members of Goucher College:*

I am much honored by being permitted to take part in some of the traditional ceremonies celebrating the entrance into our ancient and honorable order of scholarship of those younger students who have shown in their undergraduate work ability and aspiration worthy of the traditions of Phi Beta Kappa. From time immemorial men have liked to devise organizations more or less secret, with rites and ceremonies to mark and symbolize the entrance of a young initiate into wider and deeper knowledge, into the mysteries of a religion, into the ideals of some order. Even before the procession of Athenians first wound its way to the temple at Eleusis to celebrate the rites of the Eleusinian Mysteries, centuries earlier, the priests of still more ancient religions had initiated novices into the inner knowledge of their secrets. So also in instances more familiar to us, young initiates have been admitted with due ceremonies into the holy orders of the Christian Church, and youthful squires, throughout the age of chivalry, were duly instructed in the noble ideals of knighthood, kept their vigil of arms with meditation and prayer, and with the touch of the accolade on their shoulder, were admitted by some elder brother knight into the chivalrous order whose vows they assumed and whose spirit they undertook to practice through life.

Of all such ancient customs and traditions, rooted in the hearts and instincts of mankind, our order of Phi Beta Kappa is a lineal descendant. It harks back, by its Greek title, to that fountainhead of intellectual growth and inspiration, the bright and beautiful civilization of classic Hellas. The mystery into which our new members should be initiated is that of the religion of scholarship. As in all kindred rites, the ceremony through which the novice should pass is twofold. She should be given a vision of higher wisdom and inspiration. She should take upon herself the obligation to live in accord with these ideals.

My part to-day is to try to analyze the spirit which should animate this order of ours. What, then, is the spirit of scholarship?

The first element which I shall distill is one not often associated in the public mind with scholarship—that of joy and enthusiasm. Scholarly pursuits are full of pleasure; they should be followed with zest. The public in general, it is true, think of us as dull, dry, dreary souls, toiling through a painful grind. I have found this attitude amusingly illustrated in college entrance examination books. One unfortunate candidate, I remember, asked to describe Milton's *Il Penseroso*, replied, with a radical misconception of that great poem, that it was designed to portray a very sad and gloomy life, and that the most sad and gloomy scene in it represented a man sitting alone over a book at night! This idea is not unnatural to one "cramming" under pressure for examinations—a process which has only the most slender and remote connection with scholarship. But that pathetic sub-freshman should somehow have been convinced that if one is *not* "cramming" for examinations, there are few more delightful pastimes than being alone with a book, or many books.

I do not mean merely reading great literature—most persons admit that there may be some pleasure in that—but studying, investigating, indulging in research. There is, in the first place, the joy of feeling a sense of mastery over your own particular field, however small and unimportant it may be. There is also, in all research work, the joy of the thing as a game or hunt. Perhaps you chance on some evidence tending to show that your predecessors in your little subject are wrong. You need a certain fact to clinch your proof. You hunt and hunt, with all the excitement of the chase. The scent grows stronger. You get a clue to the existence of some unpublished manuscript in the British Museum which may contain the one point needful. You fly to the British Museum—or at least you do so in more peaceful times than these—you find the manuscript, decipher it in haste, and lo! it contains the fact you have dreamed of. You can prove your case. Your predecessors are wrong. You have won the game. Of course the point is probably an utterly trivial one, which will not seem of the least importance to one person in ten million. But the joy of running it down is none the less thrilling.

Of a higher sort than this mere joy of the game is the inspiring delight of finding new truth—of adding to the world's store of knowledge. The great Louis Pasteur wrote in one of his letters

telling of his researches, "I am on the verge of mysteries, and the veil which covers them is getting thinner and thinner". This sense of drawing aside the veil and revealing to mankind new truths about the wonders of nature is one of the most sacred joys of the scientific investigator.

Another type of pleasure is that sense of strenuous effort and difficult achievement experienced chiefly, I imagine, by the scholars in the realms of philosophy and higher mathematics, who seem to me the aristocrats of the intellectual world—bold spirits scaling the Matterhorns of scholarship. The real joy of extreme effort, of stretching your brain to the uttermost, Walter Bagehot has admirably analyzed in a passage in which he speaks of the "high enjoyment of consciously following pure and difficult reasoning". "Such a sensation", he says, "is a kind of sublimated pain. The highest and most intense action of the intellectual powers is like the most intense action of the bodily powers on a high mountain. We climb and climb; we have a thrill of pleasure, but we have also a sense of effort and anguish". This analogy between scholarly achievement and the noble sport of mountain climbing is a sound and illuminating one which, had I time, I should like to develop at greater length.

There are, of course, a hundred other kinds of pleasure to be drawn from the various fields of scholarship. I can mention only a few. There is the delight to be gained from travelling about in past ages, breathing the air of a civilization different from our own. There are countless pleasant acquaintances to be added to one's list of friends. Who that has once known Geoffrey Chaucer, for example, would wish to lose the privilege of enjoying his bright and healthy spirit, his delicious humor and kindly satire, and of journeying with him through the Kentish hedgerows in the month of May?

There are other charming friends as well, to be met in the misty past. And there are many other joys, such as—to take examples at hazard—wandering in the strange realms of folk lore, or through those delightful glades and forests of mediaeval romance, where Lancelot and Guenevere, Tristram and Iseult, are ever young, where Percival and Galahad ever seek the Holy Grail, illumined by the light and the haze of Celtic magic, through the romantic mazes of the great Arthurian cycle.



The fairy realm of scholarship should indeed be approached in a spirit of joy and enthusiasm, not merely with a resigned sense of duty or dogged determination. This spirit of joy makes for better scholarship, for more creative force. Such enthusiastic vitality and power women scholars are perhaps more likely to lack than men. We should not forget its value. Rarely, in any college, are the very best scholars those who are known to their fellows as typical "grinds". Never are those who pursue knowledge in the spirit really deserving to be called "grind" the truly great scholars. Scholarship is a more joyous and imaginative pursuit.

The true scholar is characterized also by a spirit of modesty and open-mindedness. It has been my privilege to know some great scholars, and I have found them generally gentle and unassertive, quite disinclined to dogmatism. Some lesser students and most ignorant persons are quick stupidly to resent criticism. But the scholar should welcome it, and, desiring only the truth, weigh carefully any destructive comments on his theories and work, and change his views if the new evidence so requires. He must maintain that somewhat difficult position of realizing and admitting that he is not infallible, that he may be wrong, and at the same time holding firmly to his opinions and acting upon them until they are proved wrong. He must also, in cases where the available evidence is far from decisive, remain in that condition of suspended judgment which is, as a critic has said, "So difficult to all but highly trained minds".

This spirit of open-mindedness also makes the ideal scholar tolerant and sympathetic towards human beings different from himself—other classes, other nations, other races. Realizing that human nature is fundamentally much the same, varying temporarily through different circumstances and conventions, he tries first of all to understand, rather than to condemn.

Nor does the ideal scholar think that his own realm is the only one of supreme human importance. He realizes that man's heart and soul have needs of profound significance outside the realms of pure scholarship—needs of emotions, of artistic joys, of human affections, of religious inspiration, of aspirations towards the vague Infinite.



His open-minded appreciation of values other than scholarly ones makes him realize especially the worth of the aesthetic element. The dry-as-dust drudging investigator in literary fields, for example, unresponsive to the aesthetic thrills of poetry, is not the ideal scholar. This ideal may be found embodied rather in the greatest French scholars, such as Gaston Paris, whose sound and admirable works glow with a fine appreciation of literary values, and are expressed in a form itself worthy of the name of literature—in that limpid, lucid, and exquisite French prose which is not the least glory of French scholarship. Something of the imagination of an artist and the grace of artistic expression increases the excellence of the scholar in all fields, in the realm of pure science as well as in that of the arts.

Perhaps even more fundamental to the spirit of scholarship is an intense hunger for knowledge, an intellectual curiosity which is irrepressible and insatiable. This is a craving which is as real to the true scholar as is the physical appetite for food and drink. Recently a student just admitted to college, who had been earning her living in the world, cut off for a time from the chance of learning, thanked me earnestly for helping her to enter and said, "You are giving me the food I have craved for years. I have felt through poverty the pangs of mere physical hunger; they are no more real or painful than is the hunger of the mind that goes unfed".

The true scholar craves knowledge for its own sake, he seeks new facts to add to the sum of human information, new truths, deeming them eminently worth seeking just because they are facts and are true. He values them quite irrespective of whether they seem to be of any immediate practical value to mankind. He must not be turned aside from his work by the clamor of those who say that his results are not useful. It is true that one of the merits of scholarship is that it often adds to human happiness, health, and convenience. But no man can tell in advance what work is to be of so-called "practical" value and what is not. In reading of the researches of Louis Pasteur in his early years one finds that the young chemist spent much time and energy in investigating the crystals formed in racemic acid—a field of research quite lacking, to the casual observer, any promise of human usefulness. A modern social service enthusiast might well

have exhorted him to abandon these unpractical realms of the scientific laboratory and devote himself to some work of real use to mankind. It was impossible for anyone to foresee that the researches of Pasteur, apparently so remote from real life, were to be ultimately of the most inestimable practical value to mankind. As Huxley once put it, "Pasteur's discoveries alone would suffice to cover the war indemnity of five milliards paid by France to Germany in 1870". And thousands on thousands of human lives have been saved by his contribution to our knowledge of the microbes of disease.

No, one cannot possibly judge in advance the practical value of any scholarly work. One should not try to. The true scholar's craving for knowledge and for new truth should not be influenced by considerations of utility and expediency. All knowledge is food for his intellectual hunger. All truth is worth seeking for itself alone.

We all realize this, I suppose, if we pause to philosophize, but often, in the process of scholarly work, when our immediate task seems trivial and profitless, we grow momentarily discouraged and wonder whether we are following a false star. Sometimes graduate students engaged in apparently petty and exhausting investigations have expressed to me these doubts. I like to recall how such misgivings were satisfied in my own case by a sudden revelation, through a concrete example, of the dignity and importance of all scholarly research.

The vision came through an illuminating illustration of the way in which the great edifice of human knowledge is slowly built. In the course of some historical work in my first year of graduate study I happened to use an excellent edition, by a French scholar, of the "Cartulary", or archives, of the Abbey of Redon, in Brittany, collected there through the middle ages. This Cartulary consisted of a very large number of documents about the property of the Abbey. The editor had transcribed, indexed, and studied them with the most minute care. He had written an introduction classifying and summarizing the most important facts which they contained. (This is, of course, a very common type of historical labor.) In a brief preface he explained the purpose of his work, and concluded by saying, in his lucid and graceful French prose, "I now reach at last, and with sincere regret, the end of this labor of twenty years".

Twenty years of thought and care on this one volume! And it was merely a brick—hardly that—contributed to the great edifice of human knowledge. It supplied a few facts about the condition of ecclesiastical serfs in a corner of Brittany, to be combined, perhaps, by some greater man with other facts drawn from hundreds of such works, and woven into some treatise on the feudal system; which in turn might be combined with scores of other treatises and enable some great creative scholar to throw new light on the evolution of human society.

Of course I had known for some years that history was based on some such foundation of scholarship; but this single concrete example happened to make me realize as nothing else had ever done the absolute necessity of this painstaking labor on the small bricks of the edifice of knowledge, its dignity, its importance, and its sacred responsibility. From this point of view all study, all graduate training, all research, however trivial it may appear to be, is justified. Thousands must be trained and must labor thus that perhaps a score may contribute something to the foundations of human wisdom. Thousands must be trained and must labor thus that *one*—and we cannot tell in advance *which* one—may attain some really great achievement in creative scholarship.

I have spoken of the sacred responsibility resting upon the scholar even if his labor be with the most obscure and insignificant particles of the foundations of knowledge. This responsibility demands, first and most essentially, absolute accuracy and truthfulness. Thus I come to the last step in my analysis of those elements which constitute the spirit of scholarship, and to that element which in importance stands first of all—a passionate reverence for truth. Truth is the cause to which the scholar is consecrated. To truth he must sacrifice every other consideration. Truth is to him the very breath of life.

As a general principle we all admit this. We easily recognize that at great heroic crises a man must perish at the stake rather than sacrifice the truth as he sees it. But we do not always realize that this sacred obligation of the scholar applies to the daily round of work in petty things as well as large. It is so fatally easy to be inaccurate—to be merely careless and mistaken, or to shirk the labor of performing all possible verification to ensure accuracy. It is so fatally easy to make sweeping conclusions from insufficient

evidence. It is so fatally easy to state something in a simple generalization, and so difficult to state it with those qualifications and reservations which accuracy may demand. It is so hard to keep keyed up every moment to the ideal of truth which scholarship requires. But we must strive constantly to do it. We must remember that in research work, for example, one little slip, one careless mistake in the humble labor at the foundations, may confuse the scholars who come after us and invalidate great results.

Those of you who have worked in the field of the Elizabethan drama may have encountered the writings of John Payne Collier, and have been perplexed and delayed for weeks by the forged documents which that able and learned investigator invented to support his theories. He was so convinced of the truth of his own conjectures that he forged proof of them. And thereby he threw off the right track temporarily many other scholars, and impeded their search for truth. It is not probable that any one of us will be tempted to the extreme of forgery in our pursuit of scholarship. But in a lesser degree, through carelessness, through intellectual confusion, through inaccuracy, we may well be tempted at times to commit the same black sin against the moral ideal of the scholar, by distorting the truth, and rendering more difficult the labors of other seekers.

Most vital of all essences in the spirit of scholarship is, then, this passionate devotion to truth. It is this which shines in the soul of the scholar as a great light in the darkness of human ignorance and bewilderment, it is this which illumines his pathway and points his course.

Some vision of this spirit of consecration should be opened before those young students who enter Phi Beta Kappa, and some realization of the responsibilities they have assumed. They should feel that they have received, as it were, the accolade of knighthood; that they have become members of an honorable order and have taken upon themselves the vows and obligations of the brotherhood of scholars; that they are bound never, in great or in petty things, to falsify the facts as they see them, never to obscure the pathway for the comrades who will come after.

In attempting to reveal something of the inner spirit of scholarship I claim no special wisdom, no priestly power to unveil the mysteries of a secret sanctuary. I speak of nothing new or

original, merely the great commonplaces of the scholar's life, and I speak as one of the humble fellowship who have toiled joyfully over the little things, and looked up with respect and admiration to the great creative scholars who stand as beacons of inspiration.

I would add one last comment. What I have said may seem to many of you to be of interest and of value only to those who are to dedicate their lives to scholarly research. But this, I think, is not quite so. What I have described as the spirit of scholarship may be transferred, with some slight amendment, to almost any other walk of life. In teaching, in medicine, in social service, in home making and child rearing, a spirit of cheerful enthusiasm, of open-mindedness, of desire for all knowledge, of appreciation of the dignity of sound work, even in little things, and of reverence for truth, may well strengthen the fibre of our moral character, help us to useful achievement, and contribute in some measure to human happiness.







UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA



3 0112 110186241